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Safety First

Our Army is better now than it has been in my 26 years of service. Today, we have the best equipment, the best training, and the finest soldiers, civilians, and families in its history. We can deploy in a moment's notice to wherever we are needed and successfully meet mission requirements.

Safety and mission accomplishment are two important parts of every soldier's life. If we are serious about our Army's readiness, leaders must be serious about safety. It is our responsibility to ensure soldiers stay alive and uninjured while preparing for combat.

Day in and day out, soldiers perform the Army's mission; however, we cannot allow our mission to become routine. When the mission becomes so familiar that we begin to ignore safety procedures, disaster will strike. It is called complacency.

Complacency is that feeling of security, while unaware of potential danger. It can happen to any one of us. Therefore, soldiers must make a conscious effort to perform every task with attention to detail, which means remaining aware of their surroundings and taking necessary precautions to reduce risks. This isn't just a good idea — this is our job as leaders.

We cannot lose sight of one very important thing — accidental death is unacceptable. We must not let down our guard when it comes to risk management. We cannot continue doing things that are injuring and killing our soldiers, such as trucks rolling over because drivers are not properly trained or soldiers being crushed by turrets because they fail to pay attention.

Each soldier is an important member of the team and teammates do not let down their comrades. When leaders and soldiers exercise smart risk-management and make sound decisions, unit readiness increases and soldiers are not injured or killed.

Track vehicle accidents continue to be a concern throughout the armor force. Soldiers are driving into other vehicles, roadside objects, such as trees and power poles, or into obstacles, such as ditches and rocks, while maneuvering cross-country. There are several reasons for accidents related to driving tracked vehicles. The most common include driving too fast for road conditions, improper use of night vision (or failure to use night vision devices all together), and failure to identify other vehicles or personnel in the area prior to moving. Track and heavy wheeled vehicles can be hard to control on slippery road surfaces. Drivers and vehicle commanders need to be familiar with slippery roads and must adjust their speeds to prevent accidents. Roads can become slick after a rainfall and when covered by snow, sand, or mud. A driver moving too quickly can lose control of the vehicle, striking whatever is in its path. Track vehicles are often much larger than other vehicles, and cause greater accidents resulting in serious injury or death.

As part of their risk-management process, leaders need to consider these hazards when defining movement speeds. Drivers and vehicle commanders often have limited visibility. During night operations, some crews will fail to use night vision devices, or during "dust out" conditions fail to reduce vehicle speed and, as a result, they run into other vehicles or even dismounted soldiers. Leaders must enforce the proper procedures regarding vehicle speed reduction and use of night vision devices during night operations.

Safety is both a reality and a state of mind. Leaders must demonstrate safety in garrison as well as in the field environment. Prior to moving vehicles, leaders must train soldiers to ensure that the intended path is clear of other vehicles and personnel. During movement in congested areas, such as motor pools, assembly

areas, or wash racks, ground guides must be used.

In most military vehicle accidents, the operator was not trained, tested, selected, or licensed properly. Sometimes the failure is only in one of these areas; others times it is a combination of the four. We must identify high-risk individuals.

The leading cause of accidental death is attributed to POVs. Most POV accidents occur relatively close to the soldier's duty station, although long-distance driving does account for a small number of the accidents. Off-duty POV accidents remain the number one killer of soldiers.

We must take every precaution while operating a vehicle. Buckle up! Seatbelts do save lives. While POV accidents account for the majority of our losses, they are not the only killers, use the common-sense approach and beware of dangerous situations and areas. Every summer, we lose soldiers to all types of hazards.

In today's complex world, safety is becoming a significant challenge. Our mission plates are full and we have fewer and fewer soldiers available to accomplish countless missions. Soldiers must be trained to follow correct procedures in every task. The present operational tempo and increased hazards mandate no shortcuts. Leaders at all levels must manage risk properly and maintain a vigil against complacency, shortcuts, and improper procedures. We cannot afford to continue to make the same mistakes.

Remember, we are a standards-based organization, and when we violate a published standard, accidents happen. NCOs must always enforce our standards to safeguard our soldiers and equipment.

Iron Discipline!